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U.S. Agencies Discuss Border Car Theft Case

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CIA and Justice Department officials met yesterday in Washington to decide whether to allow the U.S. attorney's office here to prosecute the former head of Mexico's federal security police, according to sources in the capital.

U.S. Attorney William Kennedy has been trying for four months to get approval to indict Miguel Nassar Haro, 52, for his involvement in a massive car theft ring broken up by the FBI here.

Nassar until last month headed the Direccion Federal de Seguridad (DFS), Mexico's top counterespionage and anti-terrorist police agency.

The Justice Department has blocked an indictment because the CIA considered Nassar an indispensible source of intelligence information in Mexico and Central America.

Washington sources said the meeting included discussion of the possibility of a negotiated plea arrangement wherein Nassar would admit at least some of the charges without having to stand trial in the United States.

Kennedy's office yesterday referred all inquiries to the Justice Department. A spokesman there gave only a terse "no comment" when asked about the meeting.

It was learned earlier in the week that the CIA's position regarding Nassar was that, once Nassar resigned as DFS head, the CIA had no further interest in blocking prosecution.

However, it was also learned that the FBI legal attache in Mexico City was continuing to urge that Nassar not be prosecuted.

The U.S. attorney's office here gathered evidence of Nassar's involvement in the car theft ring during the 10-month investigation by the FBI and California Highway Patrol.

Fourteen members of the gang were arrested here last July, including three DFS agents. All have been convicted. Another 14 persons were indicted but are in Mexico and thus out of reach of U.S. authorities.

The FBI estimates that the ring was responsible for the thefts of 600 cars in Southern California, worth an estimated $8.4 million.